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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000623

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV ASEC KDEM PREL GV

SUBJECT: A DARK PERIOD FOR GUINEA SAYS PROMINENT RELIGIOUS LEADER

REF: CONAKRY 0333

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. One of Guinea's prominent Christian leaders privately told Poloff that Guinea's most difficult challenges are yet to come. He believes that the current system is fundamentally broken, but that people are so focused on overthrowing the regime that they have neglected to develop a vision for the future. Normally a public figure for hope and reconciliation, the Anglican Archbishop was visibly discouraged and deeply worried about the transition ahead. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) According to Monsignor Gomez, the Anglican Archbishop of Guinea and head of the country's Christian Council, &dark times<sup>8</sup> are ahead for Guinea. On October 20, Poloff met with Monsignor Gomez, a prominent religious leader who is widely respected, and known for his balanced, objective views on political and social matters. His reputation is significant given that he is a Christian leader in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. In previous meetings, Gomez has been realistic about the challenges facing Guinea, but committed to trying to bring people together in order to minimize the potential for conflict. During his June meeting with then Ambassador Carter, Gomez was focused on trying to organize a national dialogue.

¶3. (C) During the meeting with Poloff, Gomez was visibly discouraged and deeply concerned about Guinea's immediate future. &The political situation here is very confused because we no longer have any central power; there is no central authority,<sup>8</sup> he told Poloff. Gomez pointed to the frequent ministerial reshuffles and various presidential decisions that often appear arbitrary as concrete evidence of the president's declining health. He emphasized that unlike in the past, no single authority is making decisions.

¶4. (C) Elaborating, Gomez said that the institutions of government have essentially failed and there is nothing left to work with. &People want change at an institutional level, but there is no mechanism for them to achieve such change,<sup>8</sup> Gomez said. &The authority of the entire administration is focused on one man who is no longer really there (referring to President Conte); the National Assembly is illegitimate and non-representative; and the prime minister is nothing more than a figurehead since he holds no real power,<sup>8</sup> Gomez continued. He added that legislative elections are the only available mechanism for advancing change, but that elections are unlikely to take place in the current political environment.

¶5. (C) Gomez told Poloff that the country's October 2 celebration of 50 years of independence only served to divide the people rather than bring them together as patriots. &People are even more frustrated now than they were before,<sup>8</sup> he said. Gomez said that the celebration

organizers were unable to develop a common vision. &People were watching to see whether the celebration would help us turn the page on the past, or whether it would celebrate and rehabilitate the current regime.<sup>8</sup> According to Gomez, the celebration was clearly pro-Conte.

¶6. (C) Looking to the weeks and months ahead, Gomez said that people are generally just waiting for the president to die, but then questioned if that was really the best option. &The entire country is essentially blocked at every level until Conte dies or is forced out,<sup>8</sup> Gomez said. He told Poloff that Guinea cannot continue as it has, as it risks a whole range of destabilizing developments including large-scale civil unrest and/or a military coup d,etat.

¶7. (C) However, Gomez was even more concerned about the transition period to follow. He said that everyone has been so focused on the necessity of a regime change that they have neglected to develop a vision of what should follow. &There is no clear, acceptable mechanism in place, and this is very worrying,<sup>8</sup> Gomez said. He discussed at some length the maneuvers of various political actors, families, and ethnic groups as individuals position themselves in anticipation of the power vacuum to come. For Gomez, Conte,s regime has been a somewhat stabilizing factor.

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COMMENT  
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¶8. (C) Gomez,s seemingly overwhelming sense of gloom is significant in that in the past, he has consistently

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encouraged hope. He told the Ambassador in June &I am in the business of religion and our job is to provide hope.<sup>8</sup> While his public speaking has not changed, on a more private level, Gomez was visibly discouraged. He made no mention of a national dialogue or similar initiative to bring people together. He was also deeply worried about the transition ahead. Like many other contacts in recent months, Gomez appears to be waiting for Conte,s regime to finally end one way or another so that he and others can begin working toward Guinea's future. END COMMENT.

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